open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Grade 3 Activity:

How Do We Respect Human Dignity?

Doctrinal elements:

The Ten Commandments

- Jesus gave us two great commandments: the love of God and love of neighbor (**CCC 2055**)

The Fifth Commandment

- Every human life is sacred because it has been created in the image of God. (**CCC 2258, 2319**)

"For a nation to be just, it must be a society that recognizes and respects the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. These rights precede any society because they flow from the dignity granted to each person as created by God."

– *U.S. bishops,* Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Know that we love our neighbor because we love God. We cannot love God without also loving our neighbor.
2. Understand that the sacredness of human life relates to all areas of our life.
3. Recognize the inherent dignity of each person and how we must work to ensure that all people's basic human needs are met in order to respect that dignity.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice. They reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love (Mt 22:39)."

- "Finally, too often racism comes in the form of the sin of omission, when individuals, communities, and even churches remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice when it is encountered."

- "This love 'comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28)' (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 18). By the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to share with all the world this gift of love."

Instructions for the Lesson

Begin with this prayer:

> **Children's Prayer: We Are All in God's Image**
>
> Loving Father,
>
> Thank you for the many beautiful colors
> and languages of the world
> and for making all your children unique.
>
> Thank you for creating me in your image.
> Thank you for loving me and making me wonderful.
> Help me to love like you.
>
> Help me to share your love
> with all the children you have made,
> for they are unique and wonderful.
>
> Amen.

Read the story of the greatest commandment with the students: Matthew 22:34-40

> "When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking, 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.'"

Ask the students:

- *What* does Jesus mean when he said to love your neighbor as yourself?
- *Who* are our neighbors?
- *How* do you love your neighbor as yourself?
- *Why* should we love our neighbors?

Talk with the students about the following ideas:

- We are baptized into the community of the Body of Christ.

- Every person is a child of God and that makes us all part of a human family as well.
- Ask: Who is important in your life? Your family? Friends? Siblings? Parents? Do you want them to be treated fairly, or justly?

Ahead of time, make a list of both wants and needs you can read off to the students (some silly, some serious.) For example, in the "wants" category, you could put: a new watch, that cool new headband that all your friends have, a pony, a new book. In the "needs" category you could list: shoes without a hole, a safe place to sleep, healthy food, a family who cares for me, a school to learn at, etc.

Put two pieces of paper of different colors (e.g. Yellow and Blue) on the board, one that says "WANTS" and "NEEDS" on the other. Give one yellow and one blue paper to each student:

- As you read the list of things, ask students to vote on whether something belongs on the list of "wants" or "needs."
- To vote, students should hold up on of their papers to indicate which list something should go on.

Now look at all the items on the list and ask students if they notice anything about the lists.

Talk about how the Church teaches that every person is entitled to the list of needs, and we call these needs human rights: a safe place to live, food to eat, the ability to learn, the chance to be healthy, and work to do that is safe and makes us feel useful.

- People can have a hard time getting everything they need because someone doesn't treat them fairly, based on their skin color, background, or education. We know this is wrong because God loves each of us, since we are all made in his image and are unique and special. Jesus hopes we will work to make sure each person has all their basic human needs met. (Refer to the list.)
- Sometimes, companies don't always provide work that is safe or that makes workers feel useful. Because Jesus taught us that we show our love for God by loving others, when we hear about someone who doesn't have one of their needs met, we work together as a community to change that.

Tell the story of César Chávez, who worked hard to make sure some of his fellow workers had safe work. César listened carefully to the workers and helped them to make a plan to change their situation.

Listening to one another and to God: The story of César Chávez

> *César Chávez was a heroic example of Catholic leadership. He was born in 1927. His family was Mexican American. César's family worked as migrant farmers, meaning they often had to pick up everything and move to new places to live in order to keep working. As a child, he had to go work in the fields instead of going to school. When César grew up, he met a priest who cared about making sure all of God's children are treated with dignity. He knew some people in his community did not have a safe place*

to work and were being treated unfairly. The company they worked for, which grew and sold grapes, treated them unfairly because their families sometimes did not know English and didn't have anywhere else they could work. The workers worked hard to pick the grapes, but sometimes it wasn't safe. Sometimes the farm owners didn't pay them.

We know each of us was created by God with the same needs, even though our families are from different places. César knew this, too. César loved God and knew he wanted to serve God by helping his neighbors. César and his friends met to talk about the problem. The workers knew they would be stronger if they relied on God and worked together. They decided to strike in order to make the local grape growers listen. A "strike" happens when workers stop working in order to force the people in charge to listen to them. César and his friends only used peaceful ways to ask the farm owners to listen to their workers. After lots of prayer and hard work, the workers finally got the grape growers to listen to them. The grape growers said they would change the way they treated the workers. César was a devout Catholic who prayed hard, was inspired by the way Jesus lived, and tried to live like Jesus. César showed his love for Jesus by caring for his neighbors.

Ask the students the following or similar questions:

- How did César show his love for Jesus?
- What human right(s) or need(s) from our list did Cesar work toward?
- How could you work to make sure that everyone in your community, no matter what language they speak or where they come from, is respected?

Ask the students to draw a picture of César Chávez working with his community to change working conditions.

At Home

Tell the story of César Chávez and how he tried to love his neighbors like Jesus. Talk about whether there is something in your community that you want to change. How can you join others to help make this change?

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